

Good evening and thank you all for coming here tonight.

I would like to thank Gab Smith, Executive Director here at CAM; Charmin Driver, Chair of the Board of Directors; Former Mayor and Board Member Smedes York; and the staff here at CAM for helping to make this event possible. They were so excited when we called with this idea and they jumped right in to work with us to pull it all together.

As always, thank you to our incredible communications and events staff at the city that makes the wonderful city events we all enjoy happen.

Well, it is certainly interesting times that we live in. I mentioned to a friend the other day that I was working on this speech. He immediately launched into "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness." As I smiled, I thought to myself - actually, that does kind of apply.

There is no doubt that as a country and as a state, we are very divided. Some people think that this is an age of wisdom and some very much think it is an age of foolishness. Political conversations seem to be moving farther and farther apart. And it's harder to have thoughtful discussions without triggering emotions that seem to take over any sense of reason or desire to communicate. The elections in November have pulled us into camps, often with lines drawn in the sand.

Except for when it comes to our city. I'm not saying that people here do not have strong opinions. They do - especially when it comes to party politics. But what I see is not only a willingness to put that aside but also an increased interest in being active in our community.

There are a lot of things we cannot control. But we can continue to work together to find that common thread and create the kind of community that we want to call home. And I think that it is even more important in these uncertain times.

Clearly, we are doing something right!

Our population continues to grow by about 2.3% annually. We had some big announcements by businesses of new locations or expansions. Citrix is adding 400 jobs; Optum 200; WalkMe 100; and Ateb announced an investment of \$3 million with the number of jobs still to be announced. All together in 2016 we saw a 4.3% increase in employment numbers.

Last year, 138 permits were issued for new commercial and industrial development; this was valued at over \$800 million dollars. We continue to proactively position ourselves as a city of the future. The recent additions to our market of high speed gigabit fiber offer our residents more options in high speed internet service than New York City or San Francisco.

The city now has new tools to offer businesses - both large and small - with the development of our economic development tool kit. The Building Up-Fit Grant and the Façade Grant have helped staff work with local small businesses to start or to expand in our area. We have developed partnerships both with local universities and private organizations to help entrepreneurs in many ways, such as public/private matching grants, beta testing and prototyping programs, and start-up challenge programs.

We also are working to provide more opportunities to make sure that Raleigh's success is enjoyed by everyone that lives here.

As always, we had unexpected challenges - this year, it took the form of House Bill 2. I was hoping that I could announce a resolution tonight but they continue to work to find a way to resolve this and I hope to start to repair the states reputation.

Especially, because this is not us - this is not Raleigh! We have always been and will always be an open, welcoming community to everyone that comes here.

Raleigh continues to be recognized nationally and internationally. Some of our accolades from the past year include:

- #3 Best Large City to Live In

- #2 Best City for Young Entrepreneurs

- #6 Best-Performing Large City in 2016 : Miliken Institute

- #2 Area with the Highest Number of Tech Jobs- NYTimes

In the past year, Forbes Magazine has ranked us:

- #5 City of the Future

- #3 Best City for Young Professionals

- #9 Best City for Jobs

- #4 Best City for Mid-Career Professionals in 2016

- #9 in the Top Ten Cities Americans are Moving to Right Now

- #2 Hottest Spot for Tech Jobs

- #4 Easiest City to Find a Job

#3 Best Place for Business

And just last month, U.S. News & World Report named us the #4 Best Place to Live. It's great to have these accolades from publications from across the country. But what do the people that live in Raleigh think?

Last year, we did our first ever Community Survey and what we found out was no surprise. People love living here! For all our differences, when it comes to our city we agreed on a lot.

We had great diversity of demographics represented – the findings:

- Raleigh, as a place to live was ranked excellent or good by 91%; only 2% rated it as average or poor.
- Raleigh as a place to work, overall quality of life and overall image of Raleigh were each ranked 87% and higher, excellent or good.
- 87% rated the city as an excellent or good place to raise children; only 3% rated it as below average or poor.
- Feeling of Safety in Raleigh, 85% said they feel safe overall; the average for large communities in the United States is 51%; only 3% said that they don't feel safe.
- People feel good about the services they receive from our police, with only 6% rating them below average or poor.
- Satisfaction with the overall quality of City services rated 23% above the average for other large US Cities.
- 85% of the respondents said that they were likely or very likely to recommend living in Raleigh to someone.

So what was the biggest complaint? Traffic!

I think we all heard that loud and clear in November when the Wake County Transit Referendum was passed. Thank you to all of you in the community that worked so hard for so many years to get us here. We and our partners have been hard at work on the new Wake County Transit Plan. The Draft Wake Transit Work Plan will be available for public comment beginning next week. We expect to start seeing those improved transit services in 2018. It sounds like a long way but just know that it takes 18 months to order and receive a bus!

People often see their city through the eyes of their neighborhood. Our many neighborhoods are the heart and soul of our city. There are many different neighborhoods with very different personalities. And we love where we live.

All growing cities face the same dilemma. The more popular we become, the faster we see our housing prices rise. The lack of affordable housing has become a major focus of this council.

We worked with staff to develop a plan to partner with local non-profits to build more affordable housing across the city. We know that there will always be more to do, but we are dedicated to addressing the issue and working as hard as we can to insure that people have options in housing choices available to them.

We also realize that not everyone has a home.

Last year council approved moving forward with the Oak City Outreach Center. This partnership with Wake County, The Raleigh/Wake Partnership to End & Prevent Homelessness and Catholic Charities will provide a central place for people to not only eat meals, take showers and do laundry, but it will be a central place that provides personal assessment and access to those services that are most needed by that individual.

We saw how our community can pull together to help others. During Hurricane Matthew, our city reached out to help with emergency services to those communities in need. After the hurricane had passed, the damage and the need continued. In November, we saw Fayetteville Street shut down and set with long tables as hundreds and hundreds of people came together to share a meal and raise money to help the victims of Hurricane Matthew. I want to thank the members of our community that pulled that together and gave of their time, talents and resources to provide an amazing experience for us all.

And while we had experiences that brought us together, we had experiences that tore us apart. The nation saw much division over the past year and police and race relations were often the center of attention.

Following an officer involved shooting here in Raleigh, I lead a series of Community Conversations. We started with two city wide discussions. Each was located in a different part of the city. These were hard conversations about race, religion, relationships, perceptions, prejudices, and most of all, what we can do together to make Raleigh a better place for all of us.

Following those two meetings, we took everyone's comments and prioritized those issues that rose to the top, and what was important district by district. We then followed up with a series of Community Conversations, one in each city council district. They were well attended, insightful, thoughtful and sometimes moving. I was so impressed by the willingness of people to put their hearts out there and really connect with those strangers sitting around them. We came away with a conversation for the next step. What can each of us do to make our neighborhoods, our community better for all of us. The city can't fix everything but as partners with each of you, we can create a better whole.

We will have one more city wide conversation soon and then together we will figure out where to take this. We will assess what we have heard and lay out some next steps. It's an exciting

adventure and I want to thank our staff, especially Chief Cassandra Deck-Brown, for all of the hours and hours of community outreach she has done, not just on this, but on many forums, neighborhood talks and conversations that she has had on her own.

When we think about all the accolades we have received, we have to thank our incredible staff that makes it all happen. Our staff is world class. Planning for the future while keeping up with the demands of a growing city is not easy. Whether it is land use and zoning; transportation and transit; festivals and concerts; picking up your trash; or making sure you have fresh, clean water every time you turn on the tap, our staff is dedicated to providing the best service to our citizens. From our First Responders, the police and firefighters that put their lives on the line each day for our safety, to Engineering to Sustainability and our beloved Parks, Recreation, Greenways and Cultural Resources. We are so fortunate to have such an amazing group of talented and dedicated people. I know I didn't name each department, but you get the idea, and we love you all!

Staff did some hard work this past year as they undertook a compensation study for the entire city. They tackled the question of reconciling the many different hiring schedules used over the past decade to try and consolidate them, update them, and make us more competitive in the market. It is a plan that will take a while to completely implement but I applaud the Manager's Office for recognizing the need and taking the project on. We will be a much stronger organization for it.

Speaking of strong, let me talk about our finances for a minute.

We have maintained a AAA Bond Rating since 1975. Our utility enterprise system has had a APlus rating over the past years. Last year, Moody's awarded us the final AAA rating we needed to obtain AAA ratings from all 3 bond rating agencies. This achievement allowed us to refinance our utility bonds and immediately save \$9.1 million. I want to send a special shout out to our CFO Perry James who has announced his retirement. He has been the captain of the ship that has maintained this course that has kept Raleigh financially sound and well prepared for the future.

We have many threads that weave through our departments but one that is getting special attention is Communications. Both internally between departments and externally with the public – it's hard to get in touch with 470,000 people! But we are trying.

We realize that information is key and while we are doing new and innovative things, some of our ways of communicating have not changed since the 1970s. We are a pretty innovative bunch so we put together a task force to look at all the ways available to us to both send out information and gather citizen input. What is the best way to engage our citizens. They are looking at cities across the nation to find out what the best practices are around the country.

How can we use technology to help while realizing that there is still a digital divide? We are looking forward to their report back to council and the possibilities of improved opportunities for citizens to become engaged with the ongoing creation of our city.

Finally the fun stuff, which lucky for us, is also linked to our financial future - Dix Park and the Arts and Culture scene.

We have such an incredible mixture of Arts here. Arts are a huge economic driver. Our world class NC Ballet, NC Opera, NC Symphony, and of course the North Carolina Museum of Art plus many other organizations, not only enrich our lives but bring visitors from around the world.

The NC Museum of Art has just completed an amazing park of its own and we are growing our partnership to bring great public art to our area. The local arts scene is growing. We are seeing amazing artists emerge from and come to Raleigh. Whether it is visual arts, culinary arts or music, they are also gathering attention from the rest of the country and the world.

And does this town love a festival! Just in September we have Bluegrass, Hopscotch, Spark Con and the African American Cultural Festival. The Arts Commission has produced an Arts Plan for Raleigh and one of the best parts is their commitment to increasing diverse arts & cultural activities throughout the city.

I love going to the festivals for many reasons but seeing the crowds and watching so many different people enjoy themselves and enjoy their families really does speak to who we are as a community. If we are not celebrating together, we are often enjoying ourselves in another way that binds us - our parks and greenways.

The parks and greenways fill people's lives in so many different ways. For some, it's the quiet and solitude of simply being outside. For some, it's being on the Greenway and discovering parts of Raleigh that they never knew existed. For many, it's our children programs and youth opportunities. Whether it's riding on the train at Pullen Park; riding the carousel at Chavis Park; or participating at one of our active adult centers, people from across Raleigh find themselves enriching their lives through our Parks, Recreation and Greenway system.

This brings me to Dorothea Dix Park.

The last year has been spent doing what we call "Planning to Plan". We formed an Advisory Group of 45 citizens to work with the master planner and the community to help be the repository of citizen input.

The Executive Committee reviewed the 18 responses we received from around the world to our Requests for Qualifications. We narrowed the choice down to four. They were all amazing and

brought impressive talent and credentials to the table. However, one rose to the top - Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates.

We really felt like he was the best fit for us. He truly understands that this park has to come from us. It has to feel like Raleigh and that this space is personal to so many of us. But, he also knows that we want to see something that makes people say “this is the most amazing new park in America”. We want to make a statement and he gets it. I believe that he will be able to engage the community in new and exciting ways. He has an incredible team with him and I think he has already spent more time in the park than most of the people in Raleigh! In fact, he will leave his job as a professor of Landscape Architecture at Harvard University to dedicate his time to this project. Plus, he’s fun and we are all going to enjoy the whole master planning process.

This two year planning process will produce a Master Plan for the park that we can implement over time as the state transitions off of the property. We have some great partners already as we work with NC State and the NC Department of Agriculture as our adjacent neighbors. We also saw the formation of the Dix Park Conservancy. This group of tireless advocates is dedicated to the construction and on-going success of the park. I cannot tell you what it means to have the private sector come together and spend their time and money and fundraise to ensure our success. When we see other cities with large urban parks, we can see that not only is it important to have a strong private partner, but that the economic development and financial impact that comes with a park like this can be a great economic driver for the city.

So, as divided as people feel now across the country, I think we can be the exception. We love our city. The reason it is the great place that it is, is because our community has always been willing to engage and to take part in more than just the discussion; to spend their time, lend their talents, and invest in who we are and what we will become.

This great city did not magically happen. We planned for this. Years of decisions by caring, dedicated people including elected officials, staff, volunteers, boards, neighborhoods, citizens; all of us together created this success. Together, we can make sure that Raleigh continues to be the city that we love. Now is the time to make sure that not only do we hold on tight to that thread that binds us together but to hold on tight to each other too.

It can be the best of times.

It can be the age of wisdom.

It’s all up to us.

Thank you for coming and have a great evening.